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AN
HALF-CENTURY
DISCOURSE,

ADDRESSED TO THE

PEOPLE OF BILLERICA,

FEB. 21, 1813.

BY THEIR REVEREND PASTOR,
HENRY CUMINGS, S. T. D.

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DISCOURSE.

PSALM xxxvii. 25.

I HAVE BEEN YOUNG, AND NOW AM OLD.

*Men and brethren, christian friends
and fellow-candidates for eternity !*

HAVING passed a few degrees beyond the line of threescore years and ten, I have had long experience of the mutability of all human affairs ; of the uncertainty of all sublunary enjoyments and prospects ; and of the many sorrows, that unavoidably intermix with the choicest blessings of this transitory world. Being now fallen into the eve of life, I very sensibly feel the declines of age, health and vigor, whereby I am admonished, that *my time is short*, that *my day is far spent*, and that *the night is at hand*.

Fifty years have elapsed, since I was solemnly ordained to the work of the gospel ministry in this town. Of my brethren in office, but few comparatively continue so long in the service of the sanctuary. And it gives me pleasure to add, that I know of none of the sacred order, who have lived half a century with the people of their charge, in greater love, peace, and harmony, or whose services have met with more general acceptance through such a long period, among those to whom they have stately ministered in holy things. I do not mention this under the impression of a vain

imagination, that I have done better than others, in the discharge of the obligations of the ministerial office, but to enliven my gratitude to God, who has been pleased to grant me such a distinguishing, though unmerited felicity.

Conscious I am of many imperfections and deficiencies, in the prosecution of the sacred service, in which I have been engaged, and feel, that I have stood in need, not only of the candor of the christian people, *over whom the Holy Ghost hath made me an overseer*, but, much more of the pardoning mercy of God, of which I entertain good hopes, through that blood of atonement, which is not only necessary, but sufficient, both *for the priesthood, and for the people.*

But, though conscious of many failures, I have the satisfaction of reflecting, that I have sincerely endeavoured *to declare the whole counsel of God*, and have not designedly withheld any thing, that I believed to be of importance, to promote the conviction and conversion of sinners, and the edification of saints, in faith and holiness. And while I am consoled with this pleasing reflection, I can, with the most assured confidence, appeal to all, who have so regularly and diligently attended on my ministry, as to be acquainted with my general tenor and mode of preaching, to witness for me, that while I have seriously endeavoured to guard people against the ensnaring and delusive sophistry of unprincipled libertines, infidels and sceptics, on the one hand ; and the wild vagaries of blind enthusiasm, and the baneful influence of uninlightened party-zeal, and ill-natured bigotry, on the

other ; I have also endeavoured to explain, inculcate and enforce the *peculiar* doctrines, precepts and sanctions of our holy religion ; and to this end, in conformity to my obligations as a *christian* minister, have made it my principal business, agreeably to the gospel-revelation, to lead my hearers into a just and true acquaintance with the glorious character of Jesus Christ, the *only begotten Son of God* ; with his incarnation, and the merciful design of his advent into the world ; with his noble and salutary doctrines, and the miracles he wrought, in confirmation of his divine mission ; with his heavenly example, and the nature, laws, institutions and ordinances of that kingdom of God, which is committed to his administration ; and with his voluntary humiliation and death, when he *made his soul an offering for sin* ; and also to establish people's faith in his resurrection, ascension, and merciful intercession, in the high court of heaven, and in his second appearing to judge the world, at an appointed period, every moment approaching, when the dead shall be raised, and pass into a state of final retribution, that every one may *receive according to his deeds done in the body*.

All, who have constantly attended on my ministry, I presume, can vouch for me, that such has been the general mode and tenor of my preaching ; and such the topics, which I have chiefly insisted on and discussed ; without mispending time, in laboured speculations on those abstruse points, calculated to *minister strife rather than godly edifying* ; in reference to which, the most inquisitive, acute and sage christian

philosophers and divines, equally pious, learned and judicious, have, in all ages, since the commencement of the christian æra, entertained different sentiments.

But being fully sensible, that infallibility is not the prerogative of any mortal man, I have never supposed myself to be above error and mistake. Nevertheless, being persuaded that honesty (though, considering the condition of human nature, in its present state of childhood, weakness, and imperfection, it will not absolutely prevent a liability to deception in the pursuits of knowledge, nor render any one infallible, yet) is the best preservative against *dangerous errors and fatal delusions*, I have endeavoured always to lie open to information and conviction, and to keep my mind in a disposition, readily to embrace the truth, when and wherever I could find it. And (whatever may have been my involuntary, and consequently venial mistakes) upon a review of my preaching and ministerial services, I have *this for my rejoicing, the testimony of an approving conscience, that, renouncing the hidden things of dishonesty, I have not walked in craftiness, nor handled the word of God deceitfully*; but sincerely endeavoured, according to my best judgment, and the clearest decision of my reason and moral discernment, *by the manifestation of the truth, to commend myself to the consciences of my hearers, in the sight of God*. And let me assure you, that it would have inspired my soul with great additional rejoicing and gladness, had I been a more successful labourer, in that part of the Lord's vineyard, which has been intrusted to my care and cultivation.

But though my labours in this sacred employment have not been attended with success, equal to my wishes, nor proportionate to that sincere concern, which I have felt for the welfare of my people, both in this world, and that which is to come ; many having turned a deaf ear to instructions and warnings ; hardened their necks against reproofs ; impenitently persisted in their several evil ways ; and continued incorrigibly, in an habitual neglect of christian institutions and ordinances ; refusing the benefit of all means in my power to use, for their conversion and salvation ; yet I flatter myself, that *I have not laboured altogether in vain* ; but have in some degree, through the blessing of Heaven, been instrumental of checking the prevalence of impiety, infidelity, profaneness and immorality ; of reclaiming *some sinners from the error of their ways*, and *saving some souls from death* ; of preserving *some veneration* for a governing Deity, and for divine worship ; and, in short, of advancing the cause and interest of that kingdom of God, which consisteth in righteousness and charity, peace and goodwill, and in the consolations of faith, and joyful anticipations of glory, honour and immortality, beyond the grave. Notwithstanding the many ungodly and wicked emissaries, that have been constantly employed, in all ages, and in all places, for aiding the cause of satan's kingdom, by encouraging and advocating licentiousness, both in principle and practice, and endeavouring to ridicule all religion out of the world, and to abolish all religious rites and forms ; yet I am happy to observe, that there is still a respectable church in

this town ; though not so large, as when I first settled in the ministry ; additions not having been equal to the diminutions, occasioned, by the death of members at home, and the more frequent removals of members into other towns, than formerly, when the population of the country was small to what it now is ; and also by a greater increase of scoffers, in proportion, than of professed votaries of religion, in the present age. However,

Since the commencement of my ministerial labours, 307 persons have joined in full communion with the church ; besides 199, who have been received into covenant with it, upon their making a public profession of the christian faith, without obliging themselves to come to communion, before they could see their way clear to the table of the Lord ; several of whom have been encouraged afterwards to approach the sacred altar, and join their brethren, in celebrating the memorial of the Redeemer's passion and death.

The baptisms of children, in the course of the period aforesaid, have amounted to 1415 ; of which number 703 were males. Adult-baptisms during the same period were in number 45.

It is however a matter of grief to me, to observe how many unbaptized persons there still are in this town, notwithstanding the doors of the church are open for the easy admission of every professor of tolerable understanding and decent morals, to all christian privileges. Whatever reasons any christian parents may assign, in reference either to the subject or the mode of baptism, for not dedicating their offspring to God,

in that ordinance, in their infancy, yet (unless they be of the denomination, styled *Friends*) they will acknowledge, that baptism, in some mode, and at some age or other (unless prevented by invincible obstacles) is a christian institution, obligatory at the present day ; and consequently, that they are, in duty, bound to inculcate a regard to this ordinance, on their families. But do all such parents as neglect the baptism of their children, in infancy, take care to instruct them in their duty, in reference to this sacred rite, as soon as they arrive to years of discretion ? I appeal to all unbaptized adults among us, to answer this question.

Referring this matter to the private reflections of all whom it may concern, I will entertain you, for a few moments, (if you will excuse the digression) with a note relative to the number of deaths, in this town, from the commencement of my ministry, in 1763, through the lapse of 50 years. But not having been accustomed to keep correct records of instances of mortality prior to 1784, comprising the space of about $21\frac{1}{2}$ years, I am not able to ascertain precisely the number of deaths, during that period. Yet, by attending to the statements, taken from accurate bills of mortality, beginning with July 1784 aforesaid, and continued to the close of the half century under consideration ; comprehending the term of about $28\frac{1}{2}$ years ; I hope to be able to decide the question, on such grounds of rational probability, as may be satisfactory to curious inquirers. According to these records, during the said period of $28\frac{1}{2}$ years, the instances of mortality have amounted to 559 ; of

which 273 were males; and the sum total of their ages added together 20248. Now supposing the deaths, prior to July 1784, to have been in the same proportion to $21\frac{1}{2}$ years, as 559 were from that date, to the completion of half a century, the number will amount to 421. To which, if we add the excess of, at least, 30 above the common average, in that year of extraordinary mortality occasioned by a malignant dysentery, the only epidemical, and the most deadly pestilence, that has had general prevalence through the town, since my connection with it, the number will be increased to 451. Of this number, proceeding on the same grounds of calculation, the males will be found to be 205; and the total amount of all their ages, 16336.

From the above statements and calculations, we may gather,

1. That the instances of mortality, in Billerica, in the course of 50 years, from my first settlement, have amounted to 1010; a number exceeding three quarters of its present inhabitants, according to the last census.

2. That of this number 478 were males.
3. That the annual average of deaths has been about 20.

4. That the ages of the several individuals, at their death, collected into one sum, amount to 36584. Consequently,

5. That an equal division would average to each individual, at his or her decease, a few months more than 36 years.

It may not be impertinent to add here, that of the 559 persons, who died within the above mentioned term of $28\frac{1}{2}$ years, which completed the half-century, which we have been reviewing, 91 expired under one year from their birth; and others at different ages, according to the following statement, viz.

65 between	-	-	1 and	5 years
23	-	-	5	10
11	-	-	10	15
21	-	-	15	20
26	-	-	20	25
22	-	-	25	30
15	-	-	30	35
17	-	-	35	40
23	-	-	40	45
19	-	-	45	50
21	-	-	50	55
23	-	-	55	60
15	-	-	60	65
36	-	-	65	70
31	-	-	70	75
32	-	-	75	80
42	-	-	80	85
18	-	-	85	90
8	-	-	90	95

From this statement, made from accurate bills of mortality, it is obvious, that no age is exempt from disease and death; and that all intermediate grades of human life, together with the extremes of infancy and hoary longevity, bowing under the burden of years, are equally exposed to the arrests of the king of ter-

rors ; which should teach all, both young and old, to prepare for their departure, and to strive to live as they would wish to die.—But not to protract this digression, if the above note may be considered as such, I shall proceed, with the sincerest pleasure, to observe, that

This town, from its infancy, hath exhibited a laudable example of regard for the gospel, and a zealous concern for the interests of the Redeemer's kingdom, by making suitable provision for the support of christian worship, and the administration of christian ordinances. The town was incorporated in 1655, and the first minister, viz. the Rev. Samuel Whiting, ordained Nov. 11, 1663, after he had been preaching with the people four years. From that time, for almost a century, the town was not without a settled minister ; a successor having been regularly ordained, before the decease of his immediate predecessor. The aforesaid Samuel Whiting died, Feb. 29, 1712, after sustaining the pastoral office 49 years, and about 3 months. A few years before his decease, the infirmities of age having rendered him unable to perform the whole business of his sacred calling, the Rev. Samuel Ruggles was ordained as an assistant colleague, viz. on May 19, 1708. The said Mr. Ruggles expired, March 1, 1748, having been in the ministry 40 years and about 9 months. By reason of the debilities of his age, the Rev. John Chandler, his successor, was ordained before his death, viz. on October 21, 1747. The said John Chandler continued, in the ministry, till June, 1760, when, upon his request, his pastoral

relation to the church, in this place, was dissolved, under the sanction of a council. In consequence of this event, the pulpit, for the first time, was left vacant, till Jan. 26, 1763, when it pleased the great Head of the church to consecrate the present speaker to the work of the gospel ministry among you. And, as was observed, at the beginning of this address,

Half a century has elapsed since I was solemnly separated to this sacred employment; a term of service, more than 20 years beyond what you had, at first, reason to expect; if, as some suppose, the average age of ministers, who settle in the early periods of life, reckoning from the time of their ordination, does not exceed 28 years. But *having obtained help of the Lord, I am continued to this time*, and am enabled still, though with depreciated and impaired faculties, to preach to you the gospel of his grace.

Though I am not able to ascertain the precise time, yet from the date of the ordination of the first minister, about 8 years after the town was incorporated, I infer, that it must be a little more than 150 years since a church was first gathered in Billerica. From that time to the present day, through the merciful providence of the glorious Immanuel, there has been a respectable christian society, in this town. And it is worthy of particular remark, that this church hath never been rent and split asunder, into angry and virulent parties, by ecclesiastical disputes and quarrels, and the religious, or rather irreligious animosities, altercations and wrangles of self-important and uninlightened zealots; but hath generally preserved the *unity*

of the spirit in the bond of peace, in as great a degree, as could reasonably be expected, in this militant world; especially considering the diversity of prejudices, prevalent among christians, and the difference of sentiments often entertained by them; and more especially, considering the discordant and censorious spirit, which frequently gains a pernicious ascendency in the hearts of professed disciples of the *Prince of peace.*

It may also be observed for the honour of the town (I speak on the authority of good information, having the advantage of but few ecclesiastical records prior to 1747) that from the earliest date of their connection with a gospel minister to 1760, a friendly harmony hath uniformly, or with very transient interruptions, subsisted between the church and people of God, in this place, and those, who have successively ministered to them in holy things. Their present pastor can say this, from experience, since he has been honoured with this sacred office. Though he has been fully acquainted with the peculiar difficulties attending the work of the ministry, whereof persons of other occupations and professions can form no adequate ideas; yet, amidst the great political changes and mighty revolutions, both in Europe and America, and amidst the violent collisions of angry parties, and the trying vicissitudes of calamity and prosperity, private and public, that have taken place, during the eventful period, since his sacred connection with you, he is happy to observe, that he has had such a share, in your continued friendly affections (without being obliged to

make any unreasonable sacrifices of any of the rights of a fellow-citizen) as not to have known hitherto, and he presumes he never shall know experimentally, what those perplexities, sorrows and troubles are, which are always consequent on alienations and unfriendly controversies between a minister, and the people of his charge. And,

Having spent his youth and vigor, and all his best days among you, ministering to you, in the temple, and at the altar, during a long period, when his faculties were at their highest stage of strength, perfection and energy ; and having also been seldom taken off from his public labours, in the sanctuary, either by sickness or any emergencies of private concernment, (according to his best recollection, not more than 20 sabbaths) during the space of half a century ; he confidently trusts that you will *not forsake him now he is old and gray-headed* ; but, by the continuance of your friendly regards and kind attentions, will endeavour to console and comfort him, under the uneasy feelings of age ; till growing infirmities or his dissolution, shall finally close the scene of his services on earth. Considering how old he is, he cannot rationally calculate on addressing you much longer from this sacred desk. Yet a little while, and you will see his face no more, within these consecrated walls. Look to the western horizon, and behold his sun, after a long day's service, just setting, and the shades of night just ready to environ him ; when, unless seasonable provision be made to prevent, the pulpit, in this town, will be once more vacant.

And now, my friends, let me urge the consideration of the pleasures and benefits of peace, harmony and friendship ; particularly in the instances above mentioned ; as a powerful motive, to put you upon your guard against every rising emotion of a spirit of discord, strife and animosity, and to engage you to cultivate the pacific affections and dispositions of candor, charity and good-will ; that mutual love may abound more and more, not only between pastor and people, but between individual neighbours and christian brethren, both in the present age, and through all succeeding periods of time, to the latest posterity. And to this end, may the God of peace perpetuate the ascendant influence of the friends of peace and order ; that should any incendiaries rise up to foment discords and divisive contentions (and considering the depravity of human nature, we may expect to find some persons of this description, in all societies) their mischievous machinations, as heretofore, may in future, be frustrated and defeated ; that the good people of this town, till time shall be no more, may know, by joyful experience, *how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.*

But alas ! *Our fathers, where are they ! and the prophets, do they live forever !* Since the incorporation of this town several generations have passed away ; and many worthy characters ; friends of piety and good order ; patrons and advocates of christian worship, and the performance of it in full assemblies, in the sacred courts of the house of the Lord, have long since quitted these regions of mortality, and gone the

way whence they shall not return ! Let me earnestly recommend an imitation of their laudable example, particularly in their uniform endeavours to preserve a veneration for christian institutions and the services of the sanctuary ; and to maintain and support christian ministers, for the stated and regular administration of God's word and ordinances, and the public celebration of the rites of our holy religion.

And I am the rather induced to press an imitation of their noble example, in these respects, when I attend to the moral complexion of the times, and observe the growing numbers of those audacious, self-degraded mortals, who seem to think it a mark of gallantry to be irreligious, and of refined and exalted intellectual improvement and philosophic excellence, to *deny the God, that made them, and blaspheme the Lord, that bought them.*

He must be very unobserving, who does not perceive, that religion is daily loosing ground, and the *love of many* of its votaries *waxing cold* ; while the proselytes and advocates of atheism and infidelity are rapidly increasing, and becoming more and more bold, daring and indefatigable, in their exertions, to extinguish the *sun of righteousness* ; to abolish christianity, together with its sacred rites and institutions ; and to silence or degrade its teachers. How many are there, who, discarding the doctrines of religion and grace, have openly engaged in support of the interests of satan's kingdom, and for the advancement thereof, scruple not, under the infatuation of awful delusion, to treat, with contemptuous derision and neglect, all

christian offices and ordinances ; to ridicule the professed disciples of the benevolent, meek and lowly Jesus ; and particularly to vilify the christian clergy, as a very weak or very wicked order of men ; loading them with virulent and abusive invectives and groundless calumnies, with a view to raise a prejudice against them, or to reduce them to such a state of degradation in society, as to prevent their influence in maintaining the cause of pure and undefiled religion ?

These things cannot but be for a lamentation to the friends of Zion, and impress their minds with deep concern for the interests of the Redeemer's kingdom ; under which impression, it behoves them to arouse, and zealously to exert themselves, as far as in them lies, to counteract and defeat these malignant designs of satan's emissaries ; and for this purpose, particularly, to use their utmost influence, to encourage, maintain, support, and perpetuate, christian worship and a preached gospel, in the society, to which they belong ; taking special care, in case the society should be left destitute, by the death, removal or infirmities of a former pastor, to supply the vacancy by a seasonable settlement of a successor.

Need I now remind you, my friends, that considering how many years I have been *labouring* among you, *in word and doctrine* ; and that the languors, growing infirmities and debilities, unavoidably attendant on old age, must ere long terminate in a final dissolution of my pastoral relation to you, by death ; and that they may, before that solemn event takes place, render me incapable of attending to the business of my sa-

ered function, and put an end to my ministerial labours, in part, at least, and perhaps in whole ; considering these things, you cannot but calculate upon being shortly *left as sheep without a shepherd*, unless you should seasonably employ and ordain an assistant, to take upon him the principal burden of ministerial duties, and the whole, should circumstances require it, before my departure ; and to succeed me immediately in that sacred service, after I am dead and gone, without any intervening vacancy.

From a regard to your own peace, prosperity and tranquillity, as a christian society, now existing ; and from a regard to the most important interests of the rising generation, and of generations yet unborn, let me earnestly recommend a seasonable and most serious attention to an object of such interesting concernment, wherein consequences of the most momentous consideration, pertaining to time and eternity, in reference to you and your posterity, are involved. And let me also exhort you to be frequent and fervent in prayer to the great *Shepherd and Bishop of souls*, to afford you his gracious influence, to guide and direct you, in due season, to the choice of a pastor after his own heart, to take the charge of this flock, and lead them into the pastures of heavenly grace, and eternal salvation.

And while an object of such vast magnitude engages your care and attention, let me further recommend to you, to bear in mind that apostolic exhortation, *Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits, whether they are of God, because many false prophets*

are gone out into the world ; and also to keep in remembrance the caution and warning of one, greater than an apostle, even our blessed Lord himself, in the following words, Beware of false prophets, who come to you, in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Beloved, as ye have received Christ Jesus, the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith. And be not tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, according to the slight of seducing spirits, and cunning craftiness, whereby they go about to deceive.

Take heed ; be vigilant ; be circumspect ; for satan, your grand adversary, who, to serve infernal purposes, often transforms himself into an angel of light, you may be sure, will be very busy, with the aid of disguised and insidious emissaries, to promote discord, alienations and divisions among you, and to disturb your peace and harmony, in order, if possible, to prevent your choosing and employing a good shepherd, capable of taking care of this flock ; of feeding the sheep and lambs, in due season, with suitable food for their nourishment ; of furnishing them with proper guards and shelters ; and, in short, under the aid of the *chief shepherd*, of affording them necessary protection and defence, against the intrusion of voracious wolves, in sheep's clothing, that may attempt to break in upon them, in order to scatter, or devour them.

Beware of hypocrites, and deceitful workers, and of all ostentatious pretenders to supereminent holiness,

and self-applauding, vainglorious boasters of their own superior goodness and illumination. Be upon your guard against all censorious denunciators of their brethren, as heretics and reprobates, for no other reason, but because they do not, with an implicit faith, embrace their distinguishing tenets and party-peculiarities, which they have been pleased to impress with the stamp of fundamentality, and infallible rectitude. Consider that when any erroneous and fallible mortals assume the tone and airs of infallibility, and deal largely in anathemas against their dissenting brethren, they give you just ground to call in question their own sincerity, honesty and integrity, unless they are under the influence of some delusive mental derangement.

Before you invite a candidate on probation, be satisfied that he sustains a fair character and reputation, not only within the circle of his relations and intimate friends, but hath also a *good report of them, that are without*; and when you shall be called to exercise your right of suffrage, in the choice of a candidate for ordination, be sure to proceed on satisfactory evidence, that the candidate, whom you shall honour with your vote, is not only of a good moral character, but a man of good talents and abilities; of an adequate capacity and of competent degrees of literature, for the important service, which he is about to undertake; and that he be also well established in the christian faith, making the inspired scriptures of the old and new testament, exclusive of the opinions, schemes and writings of uninspired men, the standard and criterion of sound doctrine, and the only safe and sure directo-

ry, not only in reference to faith, but also in regard to worship and moral practice. In connection with the above, I might mention several other excellent accomplishments of great use and service, and of no inconsiderable importance to those, who engage in the work of the ministry, and of great benefit to the people of their charge, such as prudence, meekness, condescension, fortitude, stability, &c ; on which the limits of my present address will not permit me to expatiate. I shall therefore only add briefly, that the qualifications before specified, are so obviously necessary to form the character of a good minister and able defender of the christian faith, that they cannot but command the first, and most serious and devout attention of every judicious christian, who feels concerned for the honour of our holy religion and its divine author.

True it is, God stands in no need of any man's parts or abilities ; much less does he stand in need of any man's ignorance, incapacity, self-conceit and vanity ; nor has he any where encouraged the use of these latter qualities, in the business of religious instruction, by giving any rational ground to expect the interposition of supernatural aid. His having once been pleased, by miracle, to give elocution to a stupid quadruped, which he had employed and enabled to reprove and rebuke the madness of a wicked prophet, and to change his intended curses into prophetic benedictions, affords no such encouragement. For miracles have long since ceased, and nothing can be more unreasonable, than to depend upon them, at the present day.

Though when *Paul hath planted, and Apollos watered, it is God's blessing that giveth the increase;* yet it would betray the want of common sense, should an husbandman, flattering himself, on this ground, with hopes of a plentiful harvest, imprudently commit the care and cultivation of his lands to unskilful workmen, ignorant and knowing nothing about the proper seasons for tillage and semination, and altogether unacquainted with the whole business of agriculture. Any farmer who should employ workmen of this description, and trust to their management, in expectation of a good harvest, from an extraordinary blessing of Heaven, would discover an high degree of insanity.

Should you be so happy, as to employ a faithful labourer, of competent skill and abilities, in this part of the Lord's vineyard; a *workman that needeth not to be ashamed*, able and ready *to divide the word of truth aright, and to distribute to every one, a suitable portion, in due season*, you will have abundant occasion to rejoice and give thanks to God, for such an inestimable blessing. And I presume you would not begrudge such an one an adequate and honourable support, to enable him to attend diligently to the proper business of his holy function, and to make a decent and respectable appearance, in such a town as this, suitable to the dignity of his heavenly calling, without the incumbrance of worldly cares and perplexities, inconsistent with a composed prosecution of the official duties of his sacred profession.

There are some indeed in all places, who, though

extravagant in almost every thing else, are wonderfully frugal, in all matters pertaining to religion and religious worship ; shewing a disposition to set up the pulpit to the lowest bidder, or to excuse themselves from paying any public homages to their Maker, unless they can *serve the Lord with that which cost them nothing.* But I presume that the generality of this people, under the impression of nobler feelings, and more generous and exalted views, will ever disdain such meanness, and despise such sordid selfishness and avarice. But not to dwell on this point ; let me crave your patient indulgence a little longer, while I prosecute my address to a conclusion, in a more general exhortation, in order to awaken and engage your most earnest attention to the obligations of piety and virtue, and the things of your everlasting peace and eternal salvation, as the same are displayed in the revelation of Jesus Christ.

With this view, after imploring the gracious influence and direction of the *Father of lights,* to guide you in all important affairs, and particularly in those, that more immediately concern you as a religious and christian society ; and *commending you to God and the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among those that are sanctified;* let me first apply to you, in the language of St. Paul, *Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God ; but exhort one another daily, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. Hold fast the profession of your faith without wavering, for he is*

faithful that promised ; and consider one another, to provoke unto love and good works. And be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know, that your labour is not in vain, in the Lord.

While you thankfully acknowledge the distinguishing goodness of God, in casting your lot in a *valley of vision* ; in a land privileged far above the generality of the nations of the earth, in regard to the blessing of evangelical light and grace, let it be your care to walk as *children of the light and of the day* ; to live up to your glorious privileges, sublime hopes, and animating prospects, and by a patient continuance in well-doing, to embrace that great salvation, which is revealed and offered in the gospel.

Esteeming christianity as the highest exaltation of your rational natures, and as the only sure way of happy living, be persuaded cordially to entertain its doctrines, cheerfully to obey its precepts, and conscientiously to walk in all its ordinances and commandments. Though the self-conceited and self-admiring advocates of infidelity, in the dismal garb of that presumptuous and unhallowed philosophy, which with audacious boldness assaults the throne of God, and undermines his governing providence, may ridicule the votaries of religion, as weak and foolish dupes of ignorance and superstition, blinded by the absurdest prejudices, and groping in the gloomy darkness of most degrading errors ; yet let not their impudent scoffs and sarcasms, unfounded in argument, shock your faith ; for upon a most critical investigation, we shall

find no cause to be ashamed of the gospel, which *brings life and immortality to light*; as it manifestly teaches doctrines worthy of a divine author; calculated to advance the dignity of human nature, and to guide our feet into the paths of peace, safety and salvation; and has, as we are well assured, received the confirmation of miraculous evidence.

It is therefore so far from being a reproach to reason, to embrace the gospel, that on the contrary, it would be a shameful stoop beneath his dignity, as a rational creature, for any one, especially under our advantages and means of information, to reject such an ^{ancient} ~~idle~~ institution, as a mere fiction, or human contrivance and fabrication, destitute of every mark of a divine original; and to risk his eternal salvation on such a forlorn presumption, without that due examination, which the most obvious maxims of prudence and wisdom demand.

Though it be impossible for us, in these remote ages, to have an ocular view of those mighty works, which the great author of our holy religion wrought, during his residence on earth, in confirmation of his heavenly mission, and the divinity of the gospel; yet we have as full evidence, as the nature of the thing will admit, that the *doctrine of salvation, which first began to be spoken by him*, was established by miracles, and sanctioned by the broad seal of Heaven; and is consequently of divine original. Nor would it be a difficult task to satisfy any serious mind, of tolerable judgment and information, if it were not under the blinding influence of some partial bias or corrupt prejudice,

that this doctrine of salvation, as it hath been transmitted down to us in the holy bible, especially in the books of the new testament, hath brought with it such authentic evidence of divinity, as is sufficient to engage our reason to assent to it, embrace it, and depend upon it. To reject it, in opposition to the strong evidence accompanying it, would indeed be to degrade ourselves as reasonable creatures, and foolishly to *choose darkness rather than light*, in violation of those principles of our rational nature, to the guidance whereof we feel ourselves obliged to submit in all cases of temporal concernment. Yea, it is obvious that men of good sense and understanding, often proceed in their secular affairs on more uncertain grounds; allowing lower degrees of evidence, to determine their choice, and regulate their conduct, in regard to the most important matters, relative to their temporal interests. If then any reject the evidence of the divine authority of the gospel, as unsatisfactory, and at the same time think it reasonable to proceed on lower evidence in the prosecution of their most important worldly interests, to what can this be ascribed, but to some base prejudice against the christian doctrine, connected with an inordinate love of the world ?

Impartiality, my hearers, always lays the mind open to conviction, and never insists on greater evidence in the cause of religion, than is allowed to be satisfactory, in the pursuits of worldly profits and delights. Let impartiality preside, and christianity will find no great difficulty in gaining a cordial entertainment among all who are seriously inquisitive, and de-

sious to know *what they shall do to be saved*, nor in obviating the cavils of unbelievers in the present *age of infidelity*, which, by an usual *catechresis*, or perversion of language, is called *the age of reason*, by the minute philosophers of modern times.

If christianity be a reality (and that it is so, it may reasonably be presumed that every honest and impartial inquirer, of common discernment, will meet with predominant evidence.) If christianity be a reality, and not *a cunningly devised fable* of human contrivance ; if it be a divine institution ; a plan concerted in the counsels of Heaven, for the recovery and salvation of the fallen race of Adam, and established by God Almighty ; it follows undeniably, that its doctrines and precepts, ordinances, rites and forms, are of vast personal concernment, and most interesting importance, to all who are acquainted therewith ; and that every one, who wilfully shuts his eyes against its light, rejects its instructions, disobeys its laws, and lives in a careless neglect of its sacred requirements, does so at his peril. *For if he that despised Moses' law died without mercy, under two or three witnesses ; of how much sorer punishment shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and counted the blood of the covenant an unholy thing, and done despite unto the spirit of grace ? For thus saith the Lord, vengeance is mine, I will recompense.*

While I thus solemnly warn you of the awful hazard and tremendous danger of rejecting or neglecting the great salvation offered in the gospel ; and earnestly inculcate the immense concernment and inconceivable

ble importance of christian faith and worship, and a reverent regard to christian ordinances ; let me add a caution against resting in an outward profession, or placing an undue dependence on the exterior garb and forms of religion, without any acquaintance with its interior operation, through the efficacy of faith, ingrafted into the heart, forming the soul to an heavenly temper, and enriching it with those divine virtues and heavenly graces, that are necessary qualifications for the *inheritance of the saints in light.*

The grand end and design of all religion and worship, is to promote holiness of heart and life, and form an heavenly temper. This is manifestly the aim, intention and principal object of christianity. We cannot therefore better *shew forth the praises of him, who hath called us out of darkness into marvellous light,* than by a cheerful submission to his laws and government, and strict conformity, both of heart and life to his will, revealed in the gospel.

An indispensable obligation lies upon all, who enjoy the gospel, to cause *the light of a pious and holy example to shine before men, that others observing their good works, may be induced to glorify our Father who is in heaven.* Even those who have hitherto *lived without God in the world,* will be charmed into an approbation and esteem of our holy religion, when they behold the virtues of piety and benevolence, of justice, candor and charity, of meekness, sobriety, temperance and purity, which it enjoins and inculcates, transcribed, in conspicuous characters, into the lives and conversations of its professed votaries. These virtues

exemplified, will exhibit the glories of the gospel, in such an engaging light, as cannot but make some salutary impressions on the minds of all beholders, capable of being affected by the beauties of holiness, and the attractive charms of moral excellence. Such heavenly qualities, such celestial habits and virtues, are the brightest ornaments of the christian profession, and do above every thing else dignify and ennable the human character. And being directly conducive to the perfection and happiness of our natures, they are true, substantial and permanent riches, opening a source of the purest, perfectest and most sublime pleasures, delights and enjoyments, of which human nature is capable, either in time or eternity. Enriched with such heavenly graces, and being in such preparation for heavenly glory, the true christian may pass the time of his sojourning on earth, in peace and serenity, animated by a blessed hope of the joys of immortality in a better world, when the present scene of mortal things shall close upon him.

And now, my beloved friends, what shall I say more ! Time would fail me, to exhaust the abundance of my heart towards you, or fully to express my earnest concern and sincere wishes for your well-being, both here and hereafter. I shall therefore close my present address, with the short, comprehensive, and pertinent exhortation of St. Paul to the Philippians.

Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are love-

ly, whatsoever things are of good report ; if there be any virtue and if there be any praise, think on these things. Those things, which ye have both learned, received and heard, do, and the God of peace shall be with you.





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